Ancient mounds and monuments.

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ANCIENT MOUNDS AND MONUMENTS. IOWA INDIANS AND MOUNDS; BY REV. G.H. POND.

Takoha , the old war prophet, says that the Iowa Indian never occupied the country around the mouth of the Minnesota River. He affirms that it once belonged to the Winnebagoes, who were long ago driven from it by the Dakotas—a few others of the Dakotas agree with Takoha . But Black Tomahawk , who is by some of the most intelligent half-breeds, considered the best Mdewakantonwan traditionist, says, that in the earliest years of the existence of the Dakotas, they became acquainted with the Iowa Indians, and that they lived in a village at the place which is now called Oak Grove, seven or eight miles from Fort Snelling, on the north side of the Minnesota river. The numerous little mounds which are to be seen about Oak Grove, he says, are the works of the Iowa Indians.

The old man says, that in ancient times, when the Dakotas had no arms but the bow and stone or horn headed arrows, and used knives and axes manufactured from the same materials, these little mounds which we now see at the place above named, were the dwellings of the Iowas. They were the enemies of the Dakotas, who used occasionally to make a war-path from Mille Lac, where they then resided, down to the Iowa village, and carry off with them scalps, which made glad the hearts of their wives and daughters. The strife between the two nations eventually became desperate, and the gods, who are always deeply interested in Indian wars, espoused the cause of the Dakotas.

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The thunder, which the Dakotas believe to be a winged monster, and which in character seems to answer very well to the Mars of the ancient heathen, bore down upon the Iowa village in a most terrible and god-like manner. Tempests howled, the forked lightnings

flashed, and the thunders uttered their voices; the earth trembled; a thunder-bolt was hurled at the devoted village, which ploughed the earth, and formed that deep ravine near the present dwelling of Peter Quinn . This occurrence unnerved the Iowas, and the Dakotas, taking advantage of it, fell upon their enemies and drove them across the Minnesota river, and burned up their village.

The Iowas then built another village on the south side of the river, near the present planting grounds of Grey Iron , where they remained till the Dakotas obtained fire-arms, when they fought their last battle with them in Minnesota, on Pilot Knob, back of Mendota. The Iowas who escaped on this occasion fled, and erected their next village at the mouth of the Iowa river, from which they were again eventually driven by the Dakotas, towards the Missouri. The old man from whom we gather the substance of what has gone before, says that these mounds are the remains of the dwelling houses of the ancient Iowas. Some say that they are not the remains of the dwellings of the Iowas, but those of some other people with whom tradition does not acquaint them; and others, still say that they are ancient burial places.

The following two or three facts may not be without interest to the reader. Some six years since, Mr. Quinn , of Oak Grove, removed the earth of one of these mounds, at the same place where Black Tomahawk Says the ancient Iowa village stood. As the earth was removed, on a level with the natural surrounding surface, charred poles and human bones were found. It was easy and natural for the imagination 9 146 to supply the rest, and make the fact corroborate the tradition of the old man, when he says that the Iowas constructed their houses by leaning poles together at the top, and spreading them at the foot, forming a circular frame, which they covered with earth. In one of these houses a man or woman had been killed, and the timbers of the house fired, which of course, would let the earth fall in upon the dead body and burning poles. At a subsequent period, when the son of Black Tomahawk was killed by a Chippewa, who was one of the little *peace-party* of Hole-in-the Day , *Sen* ., the Indians opened another of these mounds, near Mr. Quinn's door, to inter the dead body. Smoky-day affirms, that on that occasion they discovered “many

human skull bones and sets of teeth, carefully placed in a row." This seems to corroborate the other story of tradition, that these mounds were the burial places of early tribes. The earth of a third mound was lately removed, and nothing of the kind discovered. Smoky-day informs me, that at Lake Traverse, a Dakota once, who was ambitious to be inspired by the gods, caused a hole to be opened in the centre of one of these mounds, in doing which quite a number of human bones were thrown up. It is the common practice of the Dakotas, who desire to be *wakan* , or inspired by the super-natural powers, to stretch themselves on the ground in some solitary place, and there remain till the gods draw near with their communications which I believe generally occurs in the darkness of the night. On the above occasion, the "dreamer," for they call it dreaming, placed himself in the centre of the mound, in the midst of the human bones. When the stillness of night brooded over his dreaming place the spirits, whose bones he had disturbed, hovered around and treated him so rudely, that in his fright he fled for his life, and remained an uninspired man.

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STONE HEAPS AT RED WING.

To Rev. E. D. Neill, St. Paul, M. T.:

Dear Sir :—Your letter of the third instant, relating to the stone heaps near Red Wing, was duly received.

I am happy to comply with your request, hoping that it may lead to an accurate survey of these mounds.

In 1848 I first heard of stone heaps, on the hill tops, back from Red Wing. But business, and the natural suspicion of the Indian, prevented me from exploring. The treaty of Mendota emboldened me to visit the hills, and try to find the stone heaps. Accordingly, late last autumn, I started on foot and alone from Red Wing, following the path marked P on the map, which I herewith transmit. I left the path after crossing the second stream, and turning to the left, I ascended the first hill that I reached. This is about a mile distant from

the path that leads from Fort Snelling to Lake Pepin. There, on the brow of the hill, which was about 200 feet high, was a heap of stones. It is about twelve feet in diameter and six in height. The perfect confusion of the stones, and yet the entireness of the heap, and the denuded rocks all around, convinced me that the heap had been formed from stones lying around, picked up by the hand of man.

But *why* , and *when* , it had been done were questions not so easily decided. For solving these, I resolved to seek internal evidence. Prompted by the spirit of a first explorer, I soon ascended the heap; and the coldness of the day, and the proximity of my gun, tended to suppress my dread of rattle-snakes. The stones were such that I could lift or roll them, and I soon reached a stick about two feet from the top of the heap. After descending about a foot farther I pulled the post out: and about the same place found a shank bone, about five inches long. The post was red cedar, half decayed, 148 *i* . e. one side, and rotted to a point in the ground; hence I could not tell whether it grew there or not. The bone is similar to the two which you have. I left it and the post on the heap, hoping that some one better skilled in osteology might visit the heap. The stones of the heap are magnesian limestone, which forms the upper stratum of the hills about Red Wing.

Much pleased, I started south over the hill top, and was soon greeted by another silent monument of art. This heap is marked B on the map. It is similar to the first which is marked A, only it is larger, and was so covered with a vine that I had no success in opening it. From this point there is a fine view southward. The valleys and hills are delightful. Such hills and vales, such cairns and bushy glens, would, in my father's land, have been the thrones, and play grounds of fairies. But I must stick to facts. I now started eastward to visit a conical appearing hill, distant about a mile and a half. I easily descended the hill, but to cross the plain and ascend another hill, “ *hic labor est* .” But I was amply repaid. The hill proved to be a ridge, with several stone heaps on the summit. Near one heap there is a beautiful little tree, with a top like “ Tam O'shanter's ” bonnet.

In these heaps I found the bones which I left with you. I discovered each about half way down the heaps.

I then descended northward about 200 feet, crossed a valley, past some earth mounds, and ascended another hill, and there found several more stone heaps similar to the others. In them I found no bones, nor did I see anything else worthy of particular notice at present.

If these few facts should, in any measure, help to preserve correct information concerning any part of this new country, I shall be amply rewarded for writing.

Your obedient servant, J. F. AITON.

Kaposia , *Jan* . 17. 1852.

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MOUNDS OF MINNESOTA VALLEY; BY REV. S. R. RIGGS.

In the Minnesota valley mounds are numerous. They may properly be divided into: 1st. Natural elevations, *pahas* or *pazhodans* , as the Dakotas call them. 2d. Such as are partly natural and partly artificial; and 3d. Elevations which have been formed by certain processes. *Pahas* or *Pazhodans* are found scattered over the prairies, some of the more prominent of which may be seen from a great distance. Such is Heyokatee, *the house of* Heyoka ,* situated near the Mayawakan or Chippewa river, some ten miles or more above its junction with the Minnesota. This natural elevation appears at some distance to the right of the road, as one comes from Black Oak Lake to Lac-qui-Parle. But even this is hardly to be compared with the “pahawakan” or *sacred hills* , in the valley of the James' river, which are more than one hundred feet high, and can be distinctly seen from the farther border of the Coteau des Prairies, a distance of about forty miles. In passing from one point to another on the prairie, the *pahas* are very serviceable as guides to the traveler.

* Heyoka is the *anti-natural god* of the Dakotas—represented by an old man wearing a cooked hat, with a quiver on his back and a bow in his hand. In the winter, it is said he goes naked and loves the northern blasts; while in summer, he wraps hie buffalo robe around him and is still suffering from cold.

These natural elevations, where they are found near Indian villages, have been used as burial places. Among the Dakotas, the native way of disposing of the dead is that of placing them on scaffolds. A *paha* or conspicuous point is preferred as the place of erecting such scaffold, that it may be seen from a distance. At the present time, burial soon after death is practiced to a considerable extent by the Dakotas of the Minnesota Valley, including those still on the 150 Mississippi; and where they still prefer to place upon scaffolds at first, they not unfrequently bury in the course of a few months. But their graves are so shallow that, to cover the dead sufficiently, they are often obliged to carry up earth; and it is probable that formerly they carried up more than they do at present. To prevent the body from being dug up by wolves, they generally enclose the grave by setting up around, in a cone-like form, billets of wood. The decomposition of the bodies, and the rotting of the palisades and scaffolds, enrich the ground and cause a more luxuriant growth of vegetation, which, of itself, directly tends to add to the size of the mound. Then this rank vegetation forms a nucleus for drift. Then, the grass and dust which the wind blows over the prairie, lodge and make the elevation still greater. On the hill, a short distance east of the ruins of Fort Renville, to the north west and in sight of the mission houses at Lac-qui-Parle, there is a *paha* of this kind, in which, in years gone by, many persons have been buried. It now presents on the top a very irregular surface, partly owing to the interments thus made, and partly to the burrowing of the gophers in it. On the south west side of the Minnesota, a short distance back from the Wahpetonwan village, there is another mound which has been long used as a burying place. Similar ones may be found near all Dakota villages.

If the question be asked: Why do the Dakotas prefer these mounds as the places of deposit for their dead? I answer: *First* , as before suggested, that the place may be seen from a distance all around. As they wail morning and evening they can conveniently look to the abode, not only of the body of their departed friend, but as many of them believe, of one of the spirits also. *Secondly* , all *pahas* are under the guardianship of their god Heyoka . 151 *And thirdly* , a hill may be regarded as a more congenial place of rest for a spirit than a valley; and thence, too, the earthly spirit may the better hold communion with the one which has gone to the east along the “iron road,” or is above making progress on the “wanagi tachanku,” (the via lactea) or *spirit's* road.

The third species of elevations which I shall notice, have the form of embankments rather than mounds. They are artificial, found usually in the river bottoms or low planting lands, and formed by carrying out, spring after spring, the corn roots and other trash from off the field, and piling them along the outer edge or on the row between two field. sin many instances of patches that had been planted for ten or twenty years previous to the introduction of the plough, I have seen these embankments from two to three feet high, and of all conceivable shapes; some rhomboidal, some hexagonal, some oval. I remember having noticed them first, many years ago, in the old plantings at Little Six's village, where I presume they may still be traced, as I am not aware that these old fields (which were on the opposite side of the river and about two miles below the site of the present village,) have ever been ploughed. The thought has occurred to me that, perhaps, some of what have been regarded as Indian fortifications in other parts of the country may have had a similar origin.

In connection with these remarks on mounds, it is proper to give some description of a very interesting excavation and fortification which is found a few miles above the mouth of the *Pa-zhe-hu-ta-ze* or Yellow Medicine river. It is on the south side of the Minnesota, and within sight of the mission station lately commenced by Dr. Williamson . About the first of November, with my friend Dr. W., I visited this memorial of another race. The excavation

extends around three sides of a somewhat irregular square, the fourth being 152 protected by the slope of the hill, which is now covered with timber. After the filling up of years, or perhaps centuries, the ditch is still about three feet deep. We found the east side; in the middle of the ditch, to measure thirty eight paces, the south side, sixty-two, and the west side, fifty. The north side is considerably longer than the south. The area enclosed is not far from half an acre. On each of the three excavated sides there was left a gateway of about two paces. The earth was evidently thrown up on both sides; but the embankments have now almost entirely disappeared in the level of the prairie. Within the enclosure there are numerous very slight elevations, which seem to mark the places occupied by the dwellings of those who were once entrenched here. It would be interesting to know what were the form and character of those houses; but all we can learn from the present appearance of things is that they were drobably partly made of earth.

This is by far the largest and most interesting fortification that I have seen in the Valley of the Minnesota. How long ago was this , and by whom? It evidently bears the marks of and it was not probably made by the Dakotas date many years beyond their occupancy of urns country. Some band of Indians, perhaps a little in advance of the Dakotas in civilization, here entrenched themselves against the attacks of their enemies. As we stood within the enclosure and contemplated the work, we naturally asked the question: Who did this? And from the deep silence of antiquity the only answer we received was, Who .

Lac-qui-Parle.